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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/DSS/OSAC, DS/EAP/IP

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SUBJECT: 2009 ANNUAL OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL (OSAC) CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

REF: 08 STATE 132056, HCMC 1066

II. (U) OVERALL CRIME AND SAFETY SITUATION

IA. Most travelers in Vietnam feel relatively safe and crime in general is similar to many other countries throughout the world.

Pick-pocketing and petty thefts are the most frequent types of crime-reports in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). Violent crimes, such as armed robbery and kidnappings remain rare in Vietnam, especially for the ex-pat community.

Petty theft, purse snatching, and pick pocketing are most common in the areas frequented by foreigners such as major hotels, tourist sites, and public parks. HCMC is experiencing a steady increase in this type of activity. The most common modus-operandi is for thieves to utilize motorbikes in their assaults. Thieves employ two people on a motorcycle with the passenger snatching the victim's cellular phone, camera, bag, etc. - often while traveling at the same speed or faster than street traffic. This method can be especially dangerous to victims if the straps of the bag are over the shoulder or around the neck, as the victim can be pulled down or dragged by the strap until it breaks.

During 2008, there have been several reports of USG permanent and temporary duty employees losing their cellular phones to this method of theft. In some cases, a knife or other sharp cutting instruments used by the perpetrators to cut the strap, or to make a hole to reach in and steal valuables.

In general, the safety and security of guest rooms in quality hotels is good. Valuables and important documents (passport, etc.) should be kept inside a safe in the room (provided by many of the better hotels) or in a safety deposit box at the front desk. If on guided tours, secure your personal bags and, if possible, do not leave them on the tour bus/boat. If you must leave the bags, remove any valuables. There have been no reports in 2008 of USG employees having items stolen from their hotel rooms or residences. There have been two occasions that Locally Engaged Staff (LES) have had their homes broken into and Consulate cell phones and ID stolen, along with LES personal affects. There have been a number of incidents involving tourists leaving their bags on buses/boats and, upon their return, finding that their bags were stolen or rifled through for valuables.

Credit card and ATM fraud is relatively uncommon and there have been no incidents reported to U.S. Consulate HCMC

IB. Probably the two most dangerous activities in Vietnam are crossing the street and driving or riding in traffic. The road system throughout Vietnam is chaotic and traffic rules are widely ignored. Police officials admit that they have a considerable problem controlling the steadily growing number of motorcycles and vehicles on their streets. The lack of open sidewalks and adequate traffic controls (e.g. stoplights at intersections) creates a precarious situation for all pedestrians and motorists. Motorcycle accidents are particularly common and serious in nature since motorcyclists generally have less training than car/truck drivers, are often unlicensed. By western standards, the comparative death toll due to traffic accidents is staggering. If you plan on riding a

motorbike or bicycle in Vietnam you must wear a helmet.

## II. (U) POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The political situation in Vietnam is stable, with no known threat to Americans. Visitors should respect local laws and customs, and avoid unauthorized gatherings or uncontrolled crowds. Exercise care in taking photographs - photographing of military, police, or other government facilities may result in questioning by the authorities and possible confiscation of the film and/or camera. Sporadic disputes have occurred between local residents and authorities, but foreigners have generally not been involved. The most common political unrest experienced in 2008 have been Land Rights activists who gather and protest their land being seized by the GVN and not equitably reimbursed.

## III. (U) POST SPECIFIC CONCERNs

### VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Small business ventures formed by U.S. citizens in conjunction with Vietnamese partners have occasionally reported threats from their Vietnamese partners or employees if the business relationship deteriorates. Some foreign business people have faced threats, vandalism, and harassment in connection with their business dealings, though no actual physical harm has ever been reported.

### PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

One should assume that all rooms, telephones and fax machines might be monitored. Similarly, all movements and activities may be subject to surveillance. Personal possessions, media, and documents kept in hotel rooms, apartments, or at the workplace may be searched. Visitors and residents should be cautious when discussing sensitive or proprietary information.

In the past, individuals have been detained for traveling to sensitive areas and taking photographs of military installations or other sensitive areas/situations. In business disputes, local police authorities may confiscate a U.S. citizen's passport and visa. On a few occasions, individuals have not been allowed to leave the country until the dispute is resolved.

## IV. (U) POLICE RESPONSE

IA. There have been problems with consular access to American citizens. Frequently the Embassy or Consulate General is not notified when U.S. citizens are arrested or detained. The Vietnamese government considers all persons born in Vietnam or born to Vietnamese parents to be Vietnamese citizens unless they have formally renounced their Vietnamese citizenship with the Vietnamese government. For this reason, Vietnamese officials may treat U.S. citizens of Vietnamese origin differently from other U.S. citizens.

IB. In the event of an emergency, the police can be contacted by dialing 113 (Vietnam's equivalent of 911) from a local telephone, though few of the 113 operators speak English. (Depending on the nature of the incident or ongoing situation, local citizens may assist foreigners in distress by contacting police or medical authorities). If dialing 113 or assistance from local citizens is not a viable option, one should try to get to a western-type hotel where staff are far more likely to speak English and are generally very helpful in emergency situations. If you are involved in a traffic accident, altercation, or other situation that draws a crowd, leave the immediate area and contact the police.

Be aware that police are often under-funded and lack training in a number of areas. While the overall situation is gradually improving, some police have been openly solicitous of compensation, ostensibly to support local police efforts or to facilitate an investigation of a crime.

## IV. (U) MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

**IA. Clinics/hospitals catering to foreigners include in Ho Chi Minh City:**

SOS - 24-hour emergency clinic 3829-852065  
Nguyen Du Street, District 1

HCMC Family Practice 3822-78483  
4 Le Duan Street, District 1

FV Hospital 5411-33336  
Nguyen Luong Bang Street, District 7

Maple Dental 3820-1999  
72 Vo Thi Sau Street, District 1

**IB. Visitors and residents should be aware of the limitations of medical care in Vietnam. Even when adequate medical care is available at private clinics, it is often rather expensive. The quality of medical care in major cities is limited, and medical care in rural/provincial areas can be non-existent. American or western medical insurance with medical evacuation coverage is highly recommended. When traveling outside of major cities emergency medical evacuation is limited to ambulances; there are no emergency medical evacuations via helicopter.**

**VII. (U) TRAVEL PRECAUTIONS**

**IA. Try to minimize any potential losses ahead of time. When you go out, bring only what is needed and only what you can afford to lose. If you are confronted, quickly give up whatever is demanded and then leave the immediate area and contact the police. Protect identity documents and leave most of your valuables (including cash) in a safe place. If you must carry a bag, purse, or backpack, carry it in a manner that would allow you to quickly and easily release it in an emergency.**

**IB. When out on the street, be as alert as possible to your surroundings and the people around you. Watch out for distractions such as kids surrounding you to sell something and then picking your pockets, or prostitutes trying to solicit sex and grabbing a potential customer by the arm, but in reality stealing their watch. When traveling at night, it is best to go with someone you know. Don't take cyclos/pedicabs at night.**

If you are out late at night, take only metered/marked taxis, preferably from the larger taxi companies such as Saigon Tourist, Mai Linh Taxi, Vina Taxi and Vinasun. Watch out for unattended drinks in Bars; drinks can be altered in order to incapacitate a potential victim. Avoid unorganized / unauthorized gatherings such as street races or demonstrations.

**VII. (U) HOW TO CONTACT THE CONSULATE**

**U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL  
4 LE DUAN BOULEVARD  
DISTRICT 1, HO CHI MINH CITY  
TEL: (84) (8) 3520-4200  
FAX: (84) (8) 3520-4244**

**IA.  
REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICER:  
(84) (8) 3520-4435**

**OPERATOR:  
(84) (8) 3520-4200**

**MEDICAL UNIT:  
(84) (8) 3520-4354 /6**

**CONSULAR OFFICER:  
(84) (8) 3520-4446**

**POLITICAL OFFICER:  
(84) (8) 3520-4405**

ECONOMIC OFFICER:  
(84) (8) 3520-4445

DUTY OFFICER (CELLULAR PHONE):  
(84) (8) 90-392-4613

VIII. (U) OSAC COUNTRY COUNCIL  
REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICER:  
(84) (8) 3520-4435

ASSISTANT REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICER:  
(84) (8) 3520-4434

U.S. FOREIGN COMMERCIAL SERVICE  
SAIGON CENTER  
9TH FLOOR  
65 LE LOI STREET  
DISTRICT 1, HO CHI MINH CITY  
(84) (8) 3825-0490

FAIRFAX